



Implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030

Pilot action

“A future for lagging regions: Fostering the implementation of spatial strategies”

MAIN CONCLUSIONS 2nd PARTNER MEETING on STRATEGY
DEVELOPMENT //



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Strengthening local structures – Enabling the empowerment of local actors

The pilot action’s partnership that consists of six local and regional entities as well as national and European authorities, chose to focus on the topic of strategy development for its second partner meeting: What is strategy development good for and how can integrated spatial development be properly considered?

Strategy development is a tool to define and to visualise common objectives for ongoing and future challenges, to clarify tasks and to define working structures. Moreover, it is a binding element to steer difficult discussion and decision-finding processes to adjust existing infrastructures.

A dialogue on the experiences made in strategy development (objectives, barriers, experiences) took place between all partners of the pilot action, focusing on two elements of particular importance. The first one being community building for the implementation of strategies: how to activate local communities for the implementation of strategies (vertical dimension)? Secondly, it was discussed, how different sectoral departments and stakeholders can be integrated into the process of strategy building (horizontal dimension). This publication draws the main conclusions and provides regional examples from the pilot partner’s areas.

Regional and national strategies need to support bottom-up structures locally

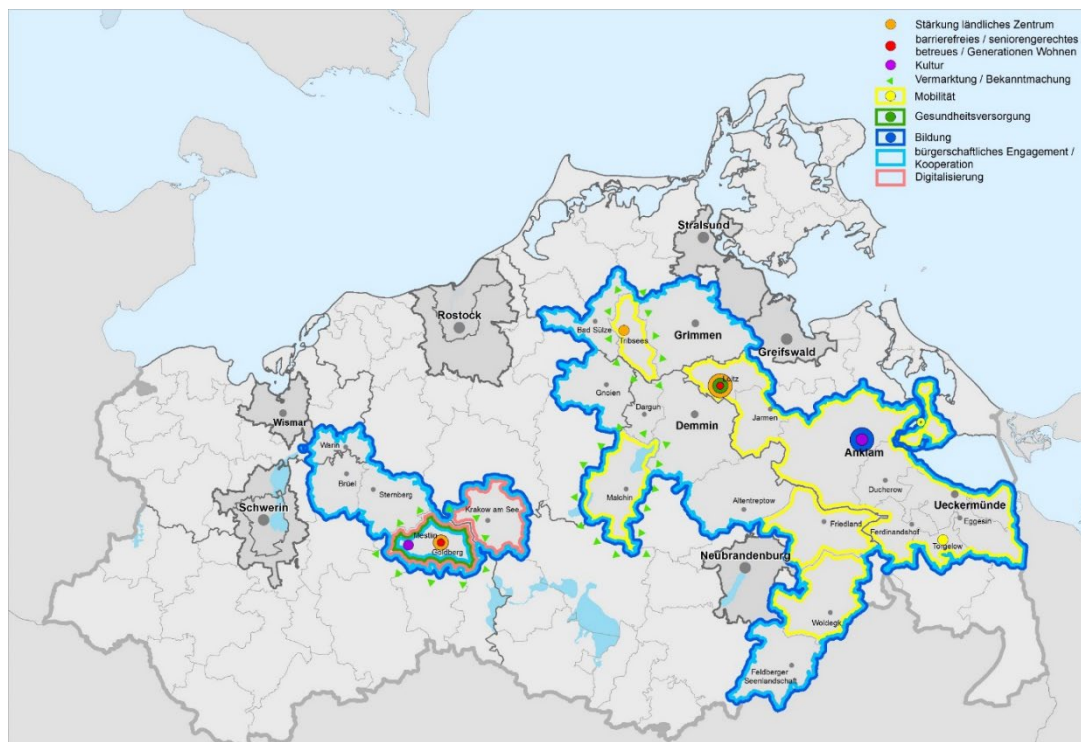
Regional and national strategies are most efficient when related measures empower and facilitate public, private and civil society actors. Rural and structurally challenged regions have limited capacities. Using existing governance and dialogue structures helps to generate long lasting and reliable bottom-up processes. Regional and national strategies and funding schemes therefore need to support local governance structures. They need to offer financial planning security for smaller as well as strategic projects. Regional examples show, that intense horizontal and vertical communication is necessary to initiate coordinated cooperation concepts and participative processes:

Rural Design Areas (Ländliche Gestaltungsräume)

The region of Mecklenburg Western-Pomerania introduced the Initiative and Funding Programme “[Rural Design Areas](#)” in 2016. Rural Design areas define a new category of regions in spatial planning. The intention was to address particularly challenged areas and to focus on interlinkages with sectoral planning policies. With this new category of areas, the planning authorities can design more tailor-made approaches for areas with demographic and economic decline. The main aim is to provide innovative support measures in the field of services of general economic interest.

- Between public administration and civil society
- Between citizens and public servants
- Between local municipalities/ and superordinate administrations.

In addition to funding, regional and national spatial development programmes should provide know-how and strategic guidance through offering consultation to municipalities and regions. The “Rural Design Areas” Initiative (see box) uses this approach successfully.



Top: Rural Design Areas as new Category in the Spatial Development Programme of Mecklenburg- Western Pomerania 2016 (LEP MV 2016), classified by thematic issues addressed through funded projects

Left: Community building – crucial for local empowerment (Impression of the historic centre of Tribsees, one of the intervention areas)

(Source: Ministry of Energy, Infrastructure and Digitalization, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania)

What if local governance structures need to be built first? Initiatives for low barrier service offers tend to be less successful if a relevant community is missing. Community building means connecting idea-generators through networks. This improves their chances to act for the benefit of the region and to implement projects. The county of Görlitz in eastern Germany tackles this challenge when setting-up a multimodal mobility-platform in a strategic way. Currently in the pilot community Boxberg located in the county of Görlitz, the information about public transport sector is limited. A multimodal platform offering information on a range of mobility-forms including car and bike sharing is planned. The biggest challenge now is to connect the right stakeholders with the project.

To facilitate processes such as in Boxberg, a **competence centre** located at the county's offices is under development. This centre will function as a one-stop shop for exchange among stakeholders, such as citizens and civil society, spatial, technical and sectoral planning authorities, companies and institutions. The county facilitates and coordinates networking for spatially relevant development initiatives. The aim is to support transparent and sustainable solution making. The competence centre will enable practical and interdisciplinary cooperation in different fields of action, such as tourism and gastronomy, mobility, public services and internal development. Using the knowledge of all relevant stakeholders helps to find integrated and sustainable solutions.

During the workshop, several further approaches to community building in their local context were presented by the partners:

Particularly in areas with widely dispersed settlements and small municipalities, which possess little administrative structures, local actors need **informal meeting points** to meet and develop ideas, for example community spaces. The initiative LandStadt-Vorarlberg supports this idea with the concept of "[Third Spaces](#)". Easily accessible meeting places are created that connect work and leisure, for example through cultural activities. Such sites enable the dialogue with superordinate decision-makers. They can be permanent or in the format of "kitchen-table-talks", such as informal meetings in someone's home, the local café or at other meeting spaces as part of a broader participation process. This approach is in particular relevant for the activation of civil society.



"Third Spaces" meeting point / community event in the state of Vorarlberg

(Source: <https://www.landstadt-vorarlberg.at/experimentierraum-in-der-landstadt-1-1>)

Next to physical spaces, accessible digital communication formats are increasingly taking on an important role in supporting an efficient community building. This includes applications such as “DorfNews” (village news) or “Dorffunk Apps” (village apps) that are under promotion in the county of Schleswig-Flensburg in the north of Germany. Using these tools, citizens can stay informed about current local politics and events or can simply connect with each other.

Strategies should support inter-municipal partnerships and generate integrated working structures

Cross-departmental and cross-sectoral working is a key success factor for spatial development in lagging regions and beyond. Sectoral policies are not always aware of their impact on spatial development. The Region of Grand Est (France) managed to get all policy fields on board via the establishment of so called Territorial Green Transition and Recovery Pacts (PTRTE, see box).

In addition, national programme and regional programme join forces and complement each other in the field to support a more balanced urban development, revitalisation of city centres and a better access to services of general interest. It is the case for instance through the Grand Est programme “Central Places” in conjunction with the National programmes “Small cities of tomorrow” and “France services”. To guarantee a better network of services particularly in rural areas or inner peripheries, a variety of services of general interest are hosted under one roof, often in formerly abandoned buildings (**maisons des services au public**). The overall national deployment goal for such houses is 2000 by end 2022; in the Grand Est territory 135 houses “public services houses” have already been set up. The initiative complements the PTRTE in supporting local communities.

PTRTE (Territorial Green Transition and Recovery Pacts)

[Territorial Green Transition and Recovery Pacts](#) are the result of a multi-level partnership agreement between the State, the Region, and inter-municipal actors. The “Pact” helps to provide tailor-made approaches to the regions in Grand Est. The PTRTE is a tool to implement inter-municipal cooperation in almost 150 places and provides effective development support to rural communities. In comparison to parallel sectoral policy activities, the approach is tailor-made and integrated and supports green transition. The process of applying for funding was simplified for municipalities and now allows a low-barrier

Inter-municipal partnerships are building blocks for regional development in the Pilot region Walgau in Austria. Inter-municipal working groups in areas such as environment, transport, finances and society are a basic pillar for the implementation process of regional spatial development concepts. Provincial funding supports the process financially (see box and [LINK](#)). The working groups receive support to provide appropriate infrastructure or services. The implementation follows a counter-flow-principle with top-down funding through the provincial state and bottom-up collaboration on site. Not all municipalities cooperate with one another on all topics such as culture, water, or public infrastructure. Cooperation is problem-driven, reactive and is often relevant in case of emergency. A roadmap for the implementation of regional cooperation in Walgau was developed due to the demand of municipalities for a common strategy and a broader knowledge of the existing cooperation in the region. This also helps to identify potential fields of future cooperation.

Funding for inter-municipal cooperation in Vorarlberg

Creating incentives to initiate inter-municipal partnerships constitutes an important building block for the Austrian Region of Vorarlberg's spatial development concept. The aim is to assure high-quality spatial planning on sub-regional level to implement Vorarlberg's spatial development objectives for 2030. A funding programme grants financial support to so-called "regions", which commonly develop and implement local and regional spatial development concepts in inter-municipal cooperation. A basic funding of EUR 60.000 per year and region as well as a surcharge per municipality support a permanent and institutionalised regional cooperation.

Creating experimental clauses and allowing innovation

What if traditional tools don't match the needs of lagging regions? Networking of local actors, visibility for ongoing initiatives as well as national and regional support for community-building offer an important basis for new ideas and creative approaches at local level when it comes to ensuring services of general interest in lagging and rural regions. In some regions, traditional tools no longer meet the needs. Digital approaches, often exported from urban into rural settings, will however require more adaptation and courage to be implemented. Experimental clauses in planning law offer the flexibility which is required for innovation.

When for example health services, which are foreseen for higher-tiers, are offered online in smaller municipalities, conflicts might arise with the competent regional authority, as centres for medical specialists providing tele-healthcare services may not match the supply-level foreseen for this (small) municipality. This is because spatial plans foresee certain functions only in certain centres, and specialized services are usually only reserved for the respective centres of a region. Rural places therefore advocate for experimental clauses regarding digitisation and higher flexibility in spatial plans, to allow for innovative solutions in areas such as tele-medicine.

The strategy of "Rural Design Areas" in the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (see first box) includes such an innovative experimental clause. It offers the possibility to diverge from standards and norms to overcome bureaucratic burdens and other obstacles to development in so-called "experimental-spaces".

The application of digital tools, related opportunities and burdens for providing services of general interests in rural areas and their impact on spatial planning will be the focus of the next meeting of the Pilot action in spring 2022.

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